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ABSTRACT

In evaluation of communication instruction, the needs of the administrator are no different from the needs of both students and faculty: information and feedback freely given and accepted is a hallmark of an environment that fosters a quality education. Since communication instruction is not different from any other kind of instruction, its evaluation should not be different either. Evaluations that have the potential for generating a quality education combine some form of student rating on a form developed at least in part by the instructor, given at a point in the semester where it will have the greatest benefit, tied to the confidentiality of the results, and coupled with significant input from professionals and colleagues. All players in this game have rights, needs, and responsibilities. In any communication environment, feedback is essential; for the communication to continue, the feedback process must be mutual. (RS)

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EVALUATION OF COMMUNICATION INSTRUCTION:

AN ADMINISTRATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

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WHAT ARE WE COMMUNICATING WHEN WE EVALUATE INSTRUCTION?

EVALUATION OF COMMUNICATION INSTRUCTION:

AN ADMINISTRATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

The issue of the evaluation of communication instruction, is really an issue of the viability of academic evaluations in toto, clearly not restricted to our parochical field(s). Several issues are part of this playground, including, though almost assuredly not limited to, the following:

1. Is communication instruction different from any other kind of instruction, (thereby needing something in the way of evaluation that other fields do not)?

2. What about the issues of tenure, promotion, merit, retention, and initial hiring?

3. Can evaluation and student rights be talked about in the same discussion, without appreciably adding to dissension? What is the general mood in country, vis-a-vis academic evaluation?

4. As a COMMUNICATION administrator, are the responsibilities, or abilities any greater than those of other administrators, (or any other communication faculty, for that matter?)

5. What are the academic freedom issues, or stated another way, are there academic freedom issues?

The answer to point one, on the difference between communication and other forms of instruction clearly has to be no. Whatever differences exist are not pedagogic in nature; we teach a discipline, with varying theories, methodologies, styles, texts, techniques, et.al., and that needs to be understood whether evaluation is defacto or dejure.

Another point needs to be said at this juncture even though it is clearly understood to all communication faculty, and really, to all in our profession. Evaluation is a communication process. It means understanding messages, looking at context and content, reacting to all types of stimuli and perhaps most important, giving and receiving feedback. It is perhaps too simplistic at the outset to call all instruction evaluation feedback, but clearly that is the route that will be taken here. The ultimate goal in a vital institution should not be the creation of a paper case for dismissal, but the improvement and education of faculty, as well as students. The evaluation process, in all its aspects, if properly set up and administered will be, ideally, a positive, and only a positive experience. The students' role in the process, that of participating in some student-instructor rating system, should not only provide useful information, but should also communicate to the student a message of excellence in intent, and in operation.

To understand academic freedom and the related issues, and to discuss it requires a definition as a starting point. The following, though clearly not universally acceptable does cover certain important areas of interest to instructors and administrators.

> All members of the faculty, whether tenured or not, are entitled to academic freedom as set forth in the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, formulated by the Associate of American Colleges and the American Association of University Professors.[1]

That statement includes the following:

> The teacher is entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing his subject, but he should be careful not to introduce into his teaching controversial matter which has no relation to his subject. Limitations on Academic Freedom should be clearly stated in writing at the time of appointment.[2]

Surely, no one can argue the importance of teaching the subject area in an appropriate manner, and it should be acceptable to assume that students taking a course listed in a catalog have a right to the course content described. The omnipresent litigious nature of students deprived of course content at least similar to catalog descriptions makes the mandating and enforcing of accepted (by department) course syllabi a protection not only for the institution but for faculty as well. The following proposed statement on academic freedom attempts to afford such protection.

> Academic Freedom is the freedom to teach and to conduct research in whatever manner a professor sees fit, subject to certain governmental, legal, and organizational constraints. These are as follows:

1. A professor is obligated to teach the contentof a properly approved and published course or curriculum, and to meet the stated needs of a prerequisite, an accreditation requirement, or a contractural commitment. The method of teaching is the professor's choice. The teaching process shall not, however, assault the dignity or civil rights of students, and shall conform to established affirmative action and equal opportunity regulations.

2. A professor may freely pursue any line of inquiry or research and may freely publish his or her findings, subject to Federal and State regulations, national security constraints, corporate contractural clearances, or other restrictions properly applicable to the work at hand. Professors entering into government or corporate contracts to perform specific research activities are expected to honor their commitments and to abide by any publishing or freedom of information constraints.

3. As an officer of the University, a professor is expected to act responsibly and in the University's best interests when dealing with students, alumni, government agencies, and external groups and constituencies. A professor should expect that his or her actions may at times be taken as representative of University policy, and that, rightly or wrongly, his or her views and opinions may be viewed as University position statements.[3]

The answers to the issues affecting tenure, promotion, merit pay and raises, and retention can be answered now with a little clearer understanding of the scope of the discussion.

> Formal evaluation of teachers by students, something that would have been viewed as the height of disrespect a generation ago, has become an accepted procedure on most college campuses. The evaluations are used to improve teaching, to help students choose courses and to assist faculty and administrators in promotion and tenure decisions.[4]

Professor John Centra, of Syracuse University has said:

> Probably one of the big changes in the last decade is the shift from using the information strictly as feedback for the course to using it extensively for tenure and promotion decisions.[5]

Thomas C. Creaves, Provost at Bucknell University sees a slightly different emphasis, especially from the perspective of the tenured faculty. The concept that makes the system he administers work better is not the fact of evaluation per se, but rather the aspect of timing.

> Tenured faculty are evaluated with respect to their teaching only once every three years.

Dr. Greaves sees the potential problems caused by evaluation in faculty-administered relationships. No doubt these problems are heightened when the department chair is also the evaluator, or at

least has a direct role in the evaluation process.

> Faculty basically see themselves asself-employed within a community of teacher-scholars. On the whole, the faculty tend to be uncomfortable with an employment model which suggests that they work and conform their behavior to the desires of administration;...

Dr. Greaves identifies the self-seen role of faculty as one of fulfillment of career, and mission, i.e. academic, including teaching and research. He points out that when faculty see career emphasized over mission, as could be the case when looking at merit evaluation, stressful situations develop. Faculty do recognize the role of student evaluations, however.

> ...faculty generally concede the utility of student evaluation of classes and the use of the data, in conjunction with other input, in discriminating various levels of professional success as a teacher. Merit evaluation, likewise seems to be a necessary part of that. Consequently, merit evaluation poses a conflicting dilema for faculty. It is stressful, frustrating, and time consuming.

Greaves ends by commending the Bucknell model, whereby tenured faculty are reviewed on a triennial, rotating basis. That way, the "comparative dimensions that justify why person A gets a slightly different raise than person B become less salient".[6]

One of the longest running student evaluation of faculty programs has existed for forty years at the Unversity of Michigan, in Ann Arbor. Dr. W.J. McKeachie, Associate Director of the National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning (NCRIPTAL) at University of Michigan has said that although some faculty do not appreciate or utilize the evaluations, it has survived in faculty balloting for the forty years it has been in existence. He says that supplemental methods for evaluation are not uniform from one department to the next.

> Some use classroom visitation; some review syllabi and examinations; most...(in a particular College) will have a discussion of the individual's teaching among the faculty committee that determine salaries and promotions. The constitution of these committees varies from department to department, the committee consists of elected members with at least two from each rank, and members of the committee do not particpate in consideration of their own rank. This produces the unusual situation that full professors are reviewed by associate and assistant professors.[7]

Although not uniformly applied institution - wide, the University of Michigan model has some sections that require evidence of teaching effectiveness, garnered from student ratings to play a role in promotion and merit pay determination.

One of the leading experts in the discussion of faculty evaluation is Dr. Donald K. Smith, Senior Vice-President of the University of Wisconsin System. Taking a historical overview of the evaluation issue, Smith reviews early personnel issues handled predominently by administration and lay boards and the ensuing growth and need based change to a peer review system.

> At least in theory, the department consists of a reasonably coherent aggregation of faculty members whose professional preparation in areas of expertise promote common standards of quality and easy communication, whose area of academic responsibility can therefore be defined.
>
> The department or equivalent academic unit, generates a "community of peers" usually the senior or tenured members of the department. This community is presumably able to evaluate candidates for membership, and resources available, to employ new members. Such new members usually enter on an probationary status, and are evaluated annually for salary recommendations, promotion recommenations, retention or nonrenewal decisions, and ultimately on the decisive determination of an award of tenure or separation from the department and university.

Smith then continues to explain the peer review as one that comprises two basic assumptions, those being:

> 1. The selections of a member of the faculty does not involve finding someone who can simply perform competently the services defined for a given position... and

2. ...that judgements ...cannot be derived wholly from credentials, point-in-time examinations, or even single interviews.[8]

Further operational assumptions assume that a collegial faculty who have the professional and institutional experience over time to make such determinations prior to and after the initial decision, and that even the initial decision was made with national input of a similar nature. It is an inherent and beneficially unique attribute of the collegiate system that the position description is a variable requiring mediation within the noted community of scholars. Smith goes on to point out,

> The faculty personnel system provides security slowly and...on the basis of a judgement which SEEKS MORE THAN COMPETENCE.[9]

A merit system, one in which differentiations are made as part of the judgement of the vitality and academic excellence of an individual's performance are recognized by Smith as a difficult task for the groups involved in the decisions affecting retention, salary, promotion et.al. However,

> Abandonment of the merit principles,...would seem to be a case of faculty members abdicating a responsibility basic to their claim to be officers of their university, primarily responsible for its quality.[10]

Further recognition of the role of mulitple input into the advising system is seen as necessary by Jack Lindquist, Director of the Institute for Academic Improvement at Memphis State University. He states,

> Student ratings of instruction,...as well as peer observation of class or critique of course syllabi and bibliography, can help generate teaching assessment. Such data-gathering should be done within the context of a relationship with a faculty development facilitator, skilled chairperson, trained colleague or student who can help interpret the data and work out a promising way to improve and who has some detachment from the situation.[11]

Lindquist lists ten STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING COLLEGE TEACHING. Number five on this list is one of the the aspects of the topic at hand, namely, student ratings of instruction. Seen as a public or private feedback mode, these are intended to provide motivation for the rectification of course or teaching problems perceived by students. Additional use is seen in this for evaluation of faculty performance, and student selection of highly ranked teachers.[12]

John Centra, mentioned earlier, has researched the area of the effectiveness of student ratings for many years and has written and collaborated extensively.

> These assessments are especially benefical as estimates of teaching or learning effectiveness or as indicators of the academic climate in departments, particularly as it affects students. Student assessments do have their limitations, however, as indeed do most forms of assessments. For this reason, it is important that multiple indicators of performance and multiple perspectives on vitality be employed.[13]

Centra indentifies certain areas in which he feels students assessment and ratings are a unique tool. He maintains that students alone can tell how they reacted to an instructor, in terms of the instructors' enthusiasm about the subject and about teaching, and the instructors ability to stimulate them. The students can judge whether the material was presented clearly, and if the information was challenging.

While recognizing that, a significant limitation of student evaluationsstill is that students are not always the best arbiters of academic worth. The student's major liability suggested by Centra, is their limited academic wisdom and experiences, and a tendency to be shortsighted. These, we can all recognize, are the very characterists we are trying to address and improve during the two, four or more years they sit at our feet, so to speak. With all this recognition in mind however, Centra identifies a handful of major studies certifying the use of student ratings in tenure and promotion decisions. This would seem to

indicate that the highly rated instructors get the lion's share of the students, raises, and promotions. Serendipitously, students also tend to learn more from the highly rated instructors, Centra's prior research also shows. However, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that student's perceptions of what they learn affect ratings. The other possible outcomes of the ratings then would be that an instructor is ranked highly, even though the students performed poorer than those taking the same course with other instructors, and that highly, or poorer rated instructors had students in class who performed and received grades along an entire scale. Clearly there was also significant variance possible given student perception of performance, size of class, time of day, etc. The value then lies in the existence of the rating system, and if it is to be used for any other pupose than for the self-administered, self-evaluated use byan instructor, certain controls need to be in place. Centra states

> Student ratings then, can help promote good teachers, but they are best used in conjunction with other indicators of teaching effectiveness such as input from colleagues, self-report information, and carefully considered estimates of student learning. When ratings are used for administrative purposes, it is especially important that there be a sufficient and representative number of students responding for a class, and that the rating forms be administered in a prescribed

> and systematic manner. In addition, global ratings, rather than ratings of specific practices or behaviors ought to be used, and ratings for several courses over a period of time would probably provide the best basis for making judgements. Certain course-related factors which can affect ratings should also be taken into account in interpreting the scores. These include class size, (small classes...get much higher ratings), type of course (college required courses are rated much lower than electives or major field courses), and the subject area of the course.[14]

James A. Kulik would seem to see the need for an additional perspective. As Associate Research Scientist, and Associate Director of the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan, (and a colleague of W.J. McKeachie, quoted earlier), Kulik is responsible for the development of a highly remarkable instructor designed questionaire used in student ratings. The system is similar to the Purdue CAFETERIA System, developed in the 1970's at the Measurement and Research Center at Purdue University. The Purdue system features a forty item evaluation form self-constructed by faculty from a two hundred item list. Five of the final forty items on the final form are university standard.[15]

The process in place at the CRLT is designed to be totally within the instructor's control, in so far as item selection, and survey

administration are concerned. The completed forms are returned to the Center for processing and the computer results returned to the instructor. The CRLT will assist with analysis if requested. There is significant motivation for the use of student evaluations by instructors at the University of Michigan, though not necessarily the method provided by the CRLT. Criteria for tenure and promotion in place and enforced (by the College of Literature, Science and the Arts), lists the following criteria:

A. Teaching
   1. List of courses taught
   2. STUDENT AND FACULTY EVALUATIONS AND THE DEPARTMENTAL MEAN
   3. Departmental enrichment by candidate
   4. Dissertation service
   5. Candidates statement
   6. Amplified Assessment
B. Research and Publications
C. Service
D. External Evaluation
F. Additional Comments

The self published guide to those seeking tenure and/or promotion, provided by the Office of the Dean also carries this admonition, in regard to the lack of use of teaching evaluations.

> A very few departments are still not undertaking student evaluations of teaching. This is inappropriate and only serves to diminish the candidate's chances for a fair evaluation. The Executive Committee expects that evidence of some evaluation of teaching will be provided in all instances.[16]

Wilbert J. McKeachie provides the final counterpart to the still prevalent comments regarding the use and significance of student learning as the final judging factor of a teacher's efforts. He recognizes that students who are accoustomed to getting good grades will (simply) study harder to compensate for less than adequate instruction. That would seem to invalidate the use of final exam results as a reliable evaluative measurement of the instructor's role in the learning process. McKeachie suggests another step.

> Today cognitive and instructional psychologists are placing more emphasis upon the importance of the way in which knowledge is structured as well as upon skills and strategies for learning and problem solving. Thus our assessment of instruction should look to these kinds of outcomes as criteria.[17]

It is, according to the researcher, difficult to collect all the necessary definitive data to perform evaluation. Called for is a rather involved set of assessments of student organizational techniques, tracking the methods students use to relate important concepts taught. Since it is recognized that this is often difficult to obtain, at least consistently, and since the fallback would seem to be the student ratings of teaching and learning, McKeachie suggests additional data from other sources.

> A cognitive approach to the evaluation of instruction also suggests that we look more at non-classroom activities of teachers - the

> ways in which teachers plan student activities and assignments to help them develop the kinds of learning and thinking strategies that we now wish to emphasize. We need to assess the degree to which teachers are using appropriate resouces, both of technology and experiental learning, in achieving these objectives; we need to evaluate the degree to which teachers help students become aware, in a meta-cognitive sense, of their own strategies and thinking. Both student reports and teacher self-reports could help document such activities.[18]

The goal of teaching being recognized here, that the teacher succeeds when the student is equipped to learn more outside the classroom than inside offers what is by now apparent,

> ...the paradoxical problem that a successful teacher may be one who gives students the sense that their success in a class is dependent upon their own effort and skill rather than upon the teacher's skill.[19]

Sidebars to the issue should also be considered before the matter is discussed further in other forums. McKeachie calls our attention to the reduced effectiveness of student evaluations resulting from overkill. The more an institution requires evaluations to be performed, or the greater emphasis that is placed on them even "officially", greater will be the students exposure and participation. While there can be an increased interest for some, others will tend to get tired of filling out the forms, and treat them as a chore, rather than a privilege. This is especially true if the students perceive that end-of-term

evaluations would help here, as would a greater examination of current semester materials provided by the instructor, while there is still an opportunity for effective feedback.

Avoidance of negative impact on the institution is imperative. Such an impact would be one in which anxiety and distrust are increased, and effectiveness decreased.[20]

> We can do a great deal in affecting the teaching of a particular faculty member in a particular course, but may have less impact upon student's learning that the total impact of a well-conceived or ill-conceived curriculum.[21]

It is also important to keep in mind the fact that academe is certainly not alone in its self-evaluation mode. The concept of the performance-appraisal interview moving consistently up the hierarchical ladder, is common. Further,

> ...most workers do not feel threatened by being evaluated. ...one of the greatest hungers employees have is to know where they stand with management. Researchers have found that receiving "personal feedback" correlates highly with job satisfaction. Appraisal interviews offer a periodic session dedicated to providing just that feedback. Furthermore, evidence suggests that most workers are satisfied with the feedback they receive in appraisal interviews.[22]

So, in conclusion there is really only one tenable position on the issue of the evaluation of communication instruction. The

"needs" of the administrator are no different from the needs of both students and faculty; whether represented by external or internal union, or under the Yeshiva decision; tenured or untenured; senior or junior ranked. A quality education in an environment that fosters improvements, vitality and the interests of all constituencies is the only possible position to take. That quality is one in which information and feedback are freely given and accepted. The quality is maintained where there is a desire to generate the feedback, and to provide what is meaningful, helpful and designed to be positive. The intent here is to equate feedback with quality.

The model evaluations - some form of student rating on a form developed at least in part by the instructor; given at a point in the semester where it will have the greatest benefit; tied to the confidentiality of the results; coupled with significant other kindsof input from professionals and colleagues, has the potential for generating thatquality. Clearly, all players in this game have rights, needs and responsibilities, and since we are dealing in a society, we recognize that the operative word here is people, and not something that can or should be totally reduced to numbers in a ledger, whether good or bad. In any communication environment, feedback is essential; for the communication to continue the feedback process must be mutual.

ENDNOTES

1. 1982 Recommended Institutional Regulations on Freedom and Tenure, ACADEME. January-February 1983, p.10a.

2. Louis Joughlin, ed. Academic Freedom and Tenure: A Handbook of the American Association of University Professors. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1967, pp. 35-36.

3. Draft Statement, Proposed Constitutional Revision, University of New Haven, 1988 (in progress).

4. Deirdre Carmody, "Evaluation by Students: Concept Comes of Age", New York times, 12-23-87, B10.

5. Carmody, New York Times.

6. Thomas C. Greaves, Provost, Bucknell University, Letter, 1-18-88 (all quotes).

7. W.J. McKeachie, Letter, 1-27-88.

8. Donald K. Smith, "Faculty Vitality and the Management of of University Personnel Policies", pp. 5-6; EVALUATING FACULTY PERFORMANCE, New Directions for Institutional Research, No. 20, 1978, Jossey, Bass Inc., San Francisco.

9. Smith, p. 6, emphasis mine.

10. Smith, p. 7.

11. Jack Lindquist, "Social Learning and Problem-Solving Strategies for Improving Academic Performance" in EVALUATING... p. 23.

12. Lindquist, pp. 26-27.

13. John A. Centra, "Using Student Assessments to Improve Performance and Vitality" in EVALUATING, p. 46.

14. Centra, p. 42.

15. James A. Kulik, "Student Reactions to Instruction", Memo to the Faculty, CRLT, University of Michigan, No. 58, October 1976, p. 2.

16. John G. Cross, Associate Dean, College of Literature, Science and the Arts, University of Michigan. Unpublished Interdepartmental Memo, September 1, 1987.

17. W.J. McKeachie, "Instruction Evaluation: Current Issues and Possible Improvements", Journal of Higher Education, Vol. 58, No. 3, May/June 1987, Ohio State University, p. 345.

18. McKeachie, Instruction Evaluation, pp. 345-346.

19. McKeachie, p. 346.

20. McKeachie, p. 348-349.

21. McKeachie, p. 348-349.

22. Ronald B. Adler, Communicating at Work, Random House, New York, 1986, p. 177.